

MORNING DEVOTIONS

Trying to Understand Grief

One of the most difficult parts of living life is losing somebody we love. The pain and grief can feel like a weight that pervades every moment. Learning to manage grief in a healthy way can be a struggle.

C. S. Lewis, the author, lost his wife Joy to a terrible and slow bone cancer, and he summed up his loss so well in his note: “No-one ever told me that grief felt like fear”. And that is a telling description of a very personal issue. What happens in your time of loss? It’s often called “grieving” – and the experience is different for everyone. But grief is a natural response to loss, especially when a loved one dies. And this pain of loss can be overwhelming.

Everyone processes loss and grief differently. Healing occurs at different rates. Some people feel that certain forms of grieving are disrespectful to those we have lost. Despite this, the most important part of handling grief is realising that there is no one correct way to do it. Everyone grieves in their own way and, provided you are not causing harm to yourself, or those around you, there are no “right” or “wrong” ways to grieve.

In other words, there is no simple way to describe the experience. If you lost your job, there is grief over that loss, or your pet dog dies – that’s also a genuine loss in your life. Or a husband and wife grieve together because they can’t have a child. There are many different situations where grief comes into our lives.

Grief is extremely complex to understand. And more qualified people than I have written on it – such as Elizabeth Kubler Ross on the various stages of grief. It’s a good idea to look up her thoughts. One thing makes sense to me. And it is this. Don’t run away or ignore your feelings of loss. They must be acknowledged and faced up to however painful.

We need to be honest about the way we feel. Bottling up the emotions or rejecting the feelings is an unhealthy way to respond. That never works out well, and only makes matters worse. We must walk through the pain, one step at a time, with others giving us love and support. So, when you are in a raw state of grief, how do you know what “normal” is?

Most of us will experience grief on a physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual level. You may feel distracted, tired, agitated, forgetful, and even be short-tempered with innocent bystanders. Stomach aches and frequent sighing is not uncommon. You may find that one moment you are crying, and in the next moment you are laughing over a happy memory. There is a long list of common responses to loss.

In 1969, Joe Bayly wrote a small book called *The View from a Hearse*. He and his wife Mary Lou had seven children and lost three of them in tragic circumstances. I’m not aware of the circumstances, but as a committed Christian and churchgoer his faith in a loving God helped him cope with his grief. But it’s hard work. He had little bit of advice and wrote this:

“One of the best contributions we can make to a person going through intense suffering and loss is our presence without words, not even verses of Scripture dumped into the ears of the grieving”.

He means that we should not give platitudes to someone with a broken heart. That’s not what they need. They need your love and understanding before you say anything. There are words of comfort, but they must be said at the right time. The first thing a grieving person needs is not that something good will come out of the terrible experience – but that someone cares.

The New Testament gives us the moving story of Lazarus, a friend of Jesus. Lazarus died and everyone was upset and grieving, and that included Jesus. John tells us in his gospel that "Jesus wept". He was upset, too, and felt the full emotion of his own personal loss of a good friend. That's why I can say, "Jesus understands and stands by you during your grief. He knew what it was like". Don't let anyone tell you that to grieve over the death of a loved one is somehow unspiritual or un-Christian. Jesus wept. It was a natural part of the grieving process.

It is astonishing to read that Jesus weeps. He is the Almighty God who can do anything. *He already knows that God the Father will raise Lazarus from the dead.* But still He weeps. And then He goes to the tomb where Lazarus is buried and calls him back from the dead.

I don't know what you're experiencing today, but God does. He not only sees your tears, but He also weeps with you. Tell him what's on your heart and trust Him to walk with you through your grief.

At times, Jesus gives us the desires of our hearts. At other times, there is silence. But no matter what, God is there. He is not only there to listen, to love and to comfort, but He understands what you are going through.

The most important thing I want to say today is that in grieving, you don't have to go through it alone. Jesus understands more than you can imagine. He wants to walk beside you in your grief. It's only in knowing that Jesus is with you that you can handle it; knowing that He has been through grief, and that you are not alone.

Take him along on your grief journey. It will be the best move you ever will take.